

**CAMERON BRIDGE FISHING ACCESS SITE  
NEW BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION  
AND  
RIGHT-OF-WAY REALIGNMENT  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
DECISION NOTICE**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Region Three, Bozeman  
July 1, 2005**

**Proposed Action**

Under the proposed action analyzed in the above named Environmental Assessment (EA), Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) seeks to grant a right-of-way modification to Gallatin County in order that they may replace the existing county bridge across the West Gallatin River on Cameron Bridge Road. The bridge replacement is necessary to meet current safety standards and traffic volume, and would be paid for with Gallatin County funds as well as a Treasure State Endowment Program grant. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks would not be contributing any funds to the project, as their involvement has been primarily to assess whether the proposed right-of-way change is appropriate and feasible. At this time, all right-of-way changes proposed on FWP property must be approved by the Director of FWP and the National Park Service (as explained below).

Related issues to the proposed action included the replacement of the existing public parking area at the current bridge site and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) encumbrance requirements.

The old parking area will be replaced by Gallatin County during road re-construction. This will be necessary if the new bridge is placed in the proposed right-of-way change. The new lot will accommodate six cars and will be constructed within the proposed abandoned approach. The layout and design of this lot will be based on the conceptual plan proposed in the EA, and the work will be coordinated and approved by FWP staff at time of construction. Initially, the proposed right-of-way modifications being sought by Gallatin County would have lead to a net loss of property to FWP's Cameron Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) totaling .33 acres. Since the site was acquired by and developed with LWCF federal funds, replacement property of equal assessed value had to be part of the proposed action as per National Park Service regulations. However, recent title and survey work done by Stahly Engineering on behalf of Gallatin County, has revealed that Gallatin County has two historic, legally granted rights-of-way across FWP property. Consequently, if Gallatin County discharges their rights to the unused portion of these two after the new proposed right-of-way is exchanged and recorded, then there would be a net gain to FWP's Cameron Bridge FAS of roughly ¼ acre. So, no replacement property is needed, and Gallatin County has indicated that they will waive the need for any compensation for this piece that FWP will acquire.

## **Montana Environmental Policy Act**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on January 26, 2005.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 30 days. The EA was mailed to 51 individuals, agencies, agency employees and public groups; legal notices were printed in the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, the *Montana Standard*, the *Belgrade News* and the *Helena Independent Record*; and the EA was posted on the FWP webpage:

<http://www.fwp.mt.gov>.

## **Summary of Public Comment**

Four comments were received on the proposal.

- 1) The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) submitted concerns that the Cameron Bridge was eligible for the National Historic register; that the replacement of the historic bridge should be considered a “potentially significant” impact; and that the relocation of the historic bridge should be pursued as a mitigation action.

Response: Though technically the bridge is not FWP property, the department works closely with SHPO on many different cultural projects and inventories and is very sensitive to the protection and preservation of historic and pre-historic amenities. On this particular issue, Stahly Engineering, on behalf of Gallatin County, contacted Jon Axline, historian for the Montana Department of Transportation, to address the same concerns that SHPO relayed to FWP. Jon determined that Cameron Bridge was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and SHPO “concurred” with that assessment. It is assumed that Gallatin County, working through the Montana Department of Transportation, will make every attempt to preserve the bridge through the Adopt-a-Bridge program.

- 2) A hunting and fishing outfitter commented that the new bridge project sounded more like an improvement for a sub-division, asked how fisherman will benefit, asked whether fences will be tied to the bridge, and stated that the money should be used for purchasing another site.

Response: As stated above, the new bridge construction will not be a FWP project. Gallatin County wants to replace the bridge for safety reasons, not as a guise for a sub-division. Assessing whether FWP should move ahead with the approval of the proposed changes to Gallatin County’s road right-of-way was the primary objective of this exercise. The department has taken steps to ensure angler access will not be negatively affected through a commitment by the county to build a replacement parking lot during the project. No FWP money will be spent on the bridge and that was never a consideration or option. Also, in an effort

not to impeded legal pedestrian access, no right-of-way or property boundary fences will be tied to the new bridge.

- 3) Two adjacent residents and property owners to the northeast of the bridge submitted questions and concerns regarding increased speeds as a result of permanent road improvements, the re-configuring of a pedestrian/angler access point to the river currently built in the fence at the northeast corner of the bridge, the potential visual impacts and safety of the proposed parking area at the southeast corner of the bridge, and temporary impacts on traffic and dust during construction.

Response: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks cannot set speed limits on county roads that pass through their sites. Cameron Bridge Road will not be an exception. We can make a recommendation regarding traffic hazard signing and speed limit posting, but Gallatin County has the ultimate legal jurisdiction. Hopefully, a reduced speed limit and hazard signing will be addressed by Gallatin County by the urging of others.

After the bridge is completed and the new road approach is in place, FWP will assess whether to re-fence their property boundary and to prohibit vehicle access on the north side of the county road to pre-construction levels. However, all indications from the proposed road realignment designs appear to put the county road very close to the northern FAS line, so this action may not be necessary.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) proposes to have the existing primitive parking area on the south side of the county road, near the bridge, replaced with a more defined and hardened lot. This plan was advanced because of the extreme popularity of this site by river users, and because FWP has a responsibility to accommodate the public and provide access where it is needed and preferred. Unfortunately, the existing developed area at Cameron Bridge Fishing Access Site is ¼ mile from the main river, so the current warm weather use is in the bridge area where the main channel flows. Although the new paved road and straightened alignment may increase traffic speeds, the proposed lot will be off the road with access to it being through an opening in the guardrail. A warning sign about congestion and/or pedestrians will be recommended to Gallatin County. The fact that both sides of the new road will have guardrail will greatly reduce or eliminate the illegal roadside parking that has gone on in the past near the bridge. In essence, activity will be more controlled here but the public will not lose access. And, yes, the new road and parking area will be elevated, but this is an engineering design standard for road construction, which is the call of Gallatin County.

Temporary traffic diversions and restrictions along with dust control will be the responsibility and authority of Gallatin County and their bridge contractor (yet to be determined). These concerns should be addressed to Stahly Engineering and the Gallatin County Road Department before construction begins.

- 4) A public lands access group thanked FWP for the opportunity to comment on the EA, and expressed their support for the Preferred Alternative C, because it will provide the greatest amount of recreational access for the public.

### **Final Environmental Assessment for the Cameron Bridge Fishing Access Site Bridge and Right-of-Way Realignment Proposal**

There are no modifications necessary to the Draft Environmental Assessment based on public comment. The Draft Environmental Assessment, together with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal.

### **Decision**

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment and the request by Gallatin County to modify the county road right-of-way facilities at Cameron Bridge Fishing Access Site, it is my decision to recommend to the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Director, Jeff Hagener, that he approve the implementation of Preferred Alternative C. This action would mean that FWP would exchange the necessary rights-of-way with Gallatin County; that FWP would grant Gallatin County a new right-of-way; and that Gallatin County would discharge, to FWP, any and all of their surplus right-of-way property not needed for the desired road re-alignment. However, this action is subject to National Park Service (NPS) approval regarding their Land and Water Conservation Fund rules of encumbrance and conversion.

I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project, other than the county road alignment changes and the subsequent changes in traffic flow and safety. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

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Patrick J. Flowers  
Region Three Supervisor